**Isaiah 65: 17-25**

17For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. 18But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. 19I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. 20No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. 21They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 22They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. 23They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord— and their descendants as well. 24Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. 25The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

**Luke 24: 1-12**

24But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.6Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” 8Then they remembered his words, 9and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

“New Good Earth”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

April 17, 2022 - Easter

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

It wasn’t the stuff of cartoons. The blackened land in southern California just next to the home of family friends carried too acrid an odor to remind me then of the scene in Bambi when human inattention or more callous disregard caused the forest and fields to burn. Somehow, in 1976 it was hard for a young person to imagine that the destruction of huge swathes of land could be real. What had been the stuff of cartoons became real when, with my friend Tom’s urging, we looked for the little sprigs of grass he had been taught would always follow such a burn. We looked, but it was too soon; all we found was blackened char of the small trees that had once grown there—never enough to provide shade, nor to block the Santa Ana winds when they blew, but they *had* been green.

It was too soon. We can be sure, though, that those same acres have grown green since then, can’t we? That is the way with vegetation when left to its own devices. God has long provided the resources we and the earth need to sustain ourselves. This isn’t to say that there are not times of drought, or of scarcity of some kind in this life. One only needs to listen to those who make their living from the land to know this is true. We know, too, that devastating forest fires happen far more frequently now and we know to credit humanity’s own actions to have spurred the destruction. Our lives are disrupted by calamity of varying kinds. Our lives eventually are more than disrupted. Our lives as we know them end. Our inheritance is death; so we have been led to understand. “The only things constant in this life are death and taxes,” after all. The unfairness of death, I imagine we might all agree, is that it is too often too soon. We are never ready for death, and we fight against it with all our worldly might, afraid that somehow when our hearts stop beating, what our lives have been will remain in memory like the charred wasteland that fires have wrought. We have a sense of endings and beginnings, and we take control as best we can, often more fearful than hopeful, and unwilling to let go in trust that God has a greater vision for our futures than we can dream. Maybe for some of us this morning, the achievement of this vision will never be soon enough.

I was kind of inordinately excited to learn that one of my favorite Christian writers has a deep connection to the peninsula, even having served as vicar of St. Brendan the Navigator Episcopal Church in Stonington. So, I have begun to reread some of Cynthia Bourgeault’s work with even greater enthusiasm than when I first met it twenty or so years ago. In her lovely book *Mystical Hope,* subtitled *Trusting in the Mercy of God,* she tells a story of watching her daughter Lucy reunite with her young boyfriend Scott. They had been separated by a four-mile strip of what must be Jericho Bay, where the family vacationed. For Bourgeault, from her vantage point of a high bluff overlooking the whole of the scene, it is as if she saw the entire drama unfold without time; that is, there was no gradual passing of time, or sequence of events, though she acknowledged them that way. She saw even the young couple’s anticipatory excitement as though it were part of a completed whole, a kind of a tableau present in space rather than time. That moment, Bourgeault ponders, helps her understand a concept that had eluded her before then: “Time—all our times—are contained in something bigger: a space that is none other than Mercy itself. The fullness (or “end”) of time becomes this space: a vast, gentle wideness in which all possible outcomes—all our little histories, past, present, and future; all our hopes and dreams—are already contained and, mysteriously, *already fulfilled.*” This idea of fulfillment is what so many of us look forward to, packaging our hopes in an untouchable sense of the future, or of eternity, while at the same time being frustrated that the new, green grass hasn’t yet sprung forth. We believe we have been promised restoration to what God has given us from the start, but we look for resurrection only in the future. Then, having a sense that we are waiting, not *acting* toward this redeemed life, we grow too often hopeless when life happens to us—too soon, and not soon enough.

Our hymn writers apparently have a better sense of God’s time than I sometimes have. We sing “Jesus Christ *is* Risen Today,” and with the joy that comes with voices raised together, we can believe that Christ is alive today, and for us. When we aren’t actively singing, though, we seem to forget God’s perspective, as Bourgeault has explained it: all our times are contained in the God’s mercy. Christ was and is alive for us; the pasts we wish to forget and the futures we long for are all together a part of God’s love, tended by God’s mercy. What this looks like for us today may deliver hope that lasts beyond this moment, with joy that continues through the year. Jesus Christ is risen today, and so are our lives when we see with God’s merciful, loving eye. Maybe for some of us, our sense of the resurrection is not contained only in the future but is somehow held captive to a physical past. Resurrection, some say, was a one-time occurrence to a one-time man, Jesus, who was one with God. This can be equally as paralyzing or hope diluting an understanding. Micheal Elliott’s collection of stories and prayers called *The Society of Salty Saints* tells of his encounters with the saints of the Jefferson Street Baptist Chapel in Louisville, Kentucky. In the book’s final reflection, Elliott helps us to reconsider this idea of resurrection only occurring in someone else’s past. Yes, Jesus Christ is risen *today*, but only if we look for Him. When Jesus presented himself to his disciples after they had sought him in the tomb, he gave them a direction: “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” It is in Galilee, Elliott reminds us, that Jesus had taught them what resurrected life on earth looks like: liberty to the captives and freedom for the oppressed.”

Why is it that some of us cannot conceive of a resurrected Jesus, much less of our own lives resurrected, restored to what God would have us enjoy? Elliott writes, and I am going to quote quite a bit here: “The reason that so many of us never see the resurrected Jesus is that we don’t do what Jesus told us to do. Instead, we relegate Jesus, and his message, to heaven. We confine him to another time and another place so we will not have to deal with the things he says that his ‘brothers and sisters’ must deal with. As the brothers and sisters do the deeds of the Kingdom, God will give us the gift of the Kingdom. And we will see the resurrected Jesus. A new family will be born, and a new society will be established. And a living Jesus will reign.

The resurrection is not just “back then.” The resurrection is now! It was not just for Jesus; it is for all who wish to be a part of the family of God. It is not just a resurrection of a corpse; it is the uplifting of a dead life to a new one. It is not a prolongation of life; it is new life here and now. We do not have to wait until we get to heaven, for the resurrection is now. We do not have to wait for life after death, for the resurrection is now! And that makes all the difference. A dead church can be made alive again, and a dead faith can be made alive again.”

God’s vision of mercy in God’s all-encompassing love, filled with all of time and all of space is not only for the future, nor was it solely an *occurrence* in the past. However, it is *we* who often prevent or block glimpses of what God would have us see and know as possible. We stop looking for Jesus in others, and we stop recognizing God’s love for us in the earth and life we have been given. But Jesus Christ is risen today!

Jesus Christ is Risen today. Alleluia! In this reality we see what God has in store for *us!* Resurrected life now and in the future. Co-creators of this beautiful vision, we can know the role we are to play when we listen to the scriptures. We begin with love—for all of humanity and for all of God’s creation. We take every step to ensure that there is no further destruction: Jesus’ call for “no more of this” applies to the earth and to human life. No more killing; no more willful ignoring of the effect our actions have on the earth we have been given. God promises us new, good earth, but we have to receive it, and to receive it does not mean to torture or pollute it. To receive it does not mean to keep it from future generations, but to preserve it as God has given it to us—abundant, green and full of hope.

As are our earthly lives—well, not green, but abundant and full of hope, because we have unlimited opportunities for love. If ever it feels like our opportunities are somehow truncated, ended too soon or brought to a destruction we never foresaw, we need only look for different opportunities to love. Maybe our new love will be for a stranger, whether someone in need of a meal, or a home, or simply a smile. So often, it is harder for us to allow for change than to fight for constancy. God does not promise the people of Israel that he will do for them “the same thing.” We do not read John’s vision in *Revelation* to be that God will make all things the same. God promises us newness, and the newness we are promised in God is abundant life for all people, and for the earth itself. The sadness of this life will disappear in God’s time, in Christ’s resurrected glory; the waste of this life will vanish when we make better use of what God gives us. These words are “no idle tale.” Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and God’s promise that we, too, will share in the glories of God’s reign are not empty words. We can see restoration, but we have to walk toward it; we have to act within the knowledge that it is true. Only then, will we know God’s desires for us to be fulfilled. We have to see with the eyes of God’s mercy in which all of time and all of space come together in God’s vision for humanity. This *is* the gift we are given and that we celebrate today. Jesus Christ is risen today! Alleluia! Amen.